At-A-Glance: Recent Research Findings

The summaries in this section are based on recent NIJ reports and/or ongoing research. The ongoing research was presented as part of the NIJ Research in Progress seminar series, which features well-known scholars discussing their work with an audience of researchers and criminal justice professionals and practitioners. The reports and 60-minute VHS videotapes of the Research in Progress seminars are available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) at 1–800–851–3420. Videotaped seminars are $19 ($24 in Canada and other countries). Many reports also can be downloaded from the NIJ Web site at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij.

School-Based Prevention of Problem Behavior: What's Being Done, Where, and How Well

NIJ Research in Progress seminar: available on videotape from NCJRS

Schools should not necessarily increase the number of delinquency prevention activities, but many could improve those already in place, according to preliminary findings of the National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools. The study found that schools engage in many prevention activities, but that the quality of these programs varies greatly.

The study's authors found that important predictors of quality and extensiveness of school-based prevention activities include the amount and quality of training; the supervision of workers carrying out the activity; support from the principal; the degree of structure involved; local responsibility for initiating the activity; the use of multiple sources of information to shape the program; and the extent to which the activity is part of the regular school program.

Gary Gottfredson of Gottfredson Associates, Inc., and Denise Gottfredson of the University of Maryland led the NIJ-sponsored study. The researchers collected, examined, and classified examples of prevention models used in schools and gathered data on the implementation and quality of programs in nationally representative surveys of principals in more than 845 schools and activity coordinators in more than 550 schools. They obtained detailed information about more than 3,700 activities directed at preventing problem behavior or promoting safe and orderly schools.

The most common prevention approach involves curriculum, instruction, or training, with 76 percent of schools reporting that they implemented at least one such activity.

Other common approaches include counseling/social work programs, the use of outside personnel, creating or maintaining a climate of expectations for student behavior, and behavioral programming or modification.

The researchers used the scientific literature to develop scales for rating prevention programs. They identified attributes required for an activity to be judged "adequate." For example, a behavior modification program was judged "adequate" if 70 percent or more of the following attributes were present: one or more persons conducted the activity on a regular basis, 70 percent or more of best practices with respect to both content and methods were used, and students participated in the activity at least daily. The best practices the researchers examined differed according to activity type.

The researchers found that 73 percent of security and surveillance activities met the criteria for adequate, whereas 42 percent of services for family members and 57 percent of prevention curriculum, instruction, or training programs were rated as adequate. There was great variability in quality of implementation for each kind of prevention activity. Better programs usually involved more structure, more supervision, better training, and the use of more information—suggesting that there are mechanisms for improving the quality of delinquency prevention in schools.

Guidelines for Making Schools Safer

Report available from the NIJ Web site at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij or from NCJRS

Recent, tragic instances of violence in the Nation's schools have brought the issues of school security and safety to the top of the agenda of public policymakers, school administrators, and the public. Causes and solutions remain a matter of debate, but guidance on the benefits and limitations of various security technologies is available in a handbook NIJ recently published for school administrators and their law enforcement agency partners who are considering ways to make schools safer.

The Appropriate and Effective Use of Security Technologies in U.S. Schools covers products that can be used to address violence, with separate chapters on video surveillance, weapons detection, entry control, and alarm devices.

In language accessible to the nonexpert, the guide presents information about the kinds of devices on the market; explains how they work; lists their advantages and disadvantages and their expected effectiveness; and explores legal implications for their use. Although one of the most attractive features of technology-based devices is the possibility for savings, cost remains a consideration. Thus the guide also contains information about the costs of installation, long-term operation and maintenance, staffing, and training.

The report's appendix features an extensive list of resources containing the names of organizations, books and other publications, Web sites, and conferences concerned with school safety and security. Future volumes in the series will deal with such issues as door, lock, and key control devices; glass-break sensors; explosives detection; and drug and alcohol use detection.

The guidelines were the product of an interagency agreement between NIJ and the U.S. Department of Energy's Sandia National Laboratories and were developed with the participation of the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools program and officials responsible for school security in various school districts and police departments nationwide.

The Appropriate and Effective Use of Security Technologies in U.S. Schools: A Guide for Schools and Law Enforcement Agencies, by Mary W. Green (Research Report, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, September 1999), can be downloaded from the NIJ Web site at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij or ordered from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJ 178265).

The Impact of Arrest on Domestic Violence: Results From Five Policy Experiments

NIJ Research in Progress seminar: available on videotape from NCJRS

Arresting domestic violence suspects has modest deterrent effects, according to the preliminary findings of a study sponsored by the National Institute of Justice, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. Researchers also found that younger men and men with prior arrests are more likely to recidivate.

The Spouse Assault Replication Program (SARP) collected and archived arrest and outcome data in five jurisdictions: Charlotte, North Carolina; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Dade County, Florida; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Omaha, Nebraska. The study was conducted by Christopher Maxwell of Michigan State University, Joel Garner of the Joint Centers for Justice Studies, and Jeffrey Fagan of Columbia University.

To some extent, SARP is modeled after the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment of the early 1980's, which is considered a landmark study of responses to domestic violence because it was the first to focus on victim safety. (Previous research concentrated on the safety of officers responding to domestic disputes.) The Minneapolis experiment showed that arresting the offender was more effective than officers advising and informally mediating or separating the couple. The study's authors, the Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence, and the scientific community called for replication of the Minneapolis experiment.

Although SARP is an outgrowth of the Minneapolis research, it is not a direct replication: The researchers redesigned the victim interview procedures, enhanced the analytic procedures, and chose not to use the procedures for randomization used in Minneapolis.

SARP's primary data sources were police arrest reports, supplementary reports about the incidents, initial and followup interviews with the victims, and police records about subsequent complaints or arrests involving the suspects and their victims. Common data included the nature of the incident, the treatment assigned and delivered by the police officers, demographic information about the parties, and outcomes pertaining to later violence.

According to the victim interviews, postincident aggression occurred on average 30 percent less often against the victims whose batterers were arrested. These data also showed that suspects who were older and employed reoffended less often. However, white batterers committed about 35 percent more acts of aggression against their victims than did African-American and other minority suspects. Suspects who were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the incident offended more frequently against the victim than those who were not drinking or using drugs. Having at least one prior arrest increased by 56 percent the likelihood that a suspect would have at least one more incident of aggression after the experimental incident.

According to the official records, approximately 60 percent of all

suspects never reoffended during the study's followup period, which for some suspects lasted more than 3 years. With the exception of arrest and race, the relationship between other measures and reoffending were similar to those from the victim interviews. With regard to the effect of arrest, the researchers found consistently that the level of aggression was only slightly less among suspects arrested at the time of the experimental incident. The researchers also found that minority suspects were 30 percent more likely to have a subsequent officially recorded incident of aggression than were white suspects. Analysis of the official records also found no significant variation among the sites in terms of the relationship between arrest and subsequent offenses against the victim. But the researchers did find that the longer the period between the experimental incident and the last victim interview, the more likely the suspects were to have reoffended against the victim.

The researchers describe several areas needing further research, including the level of deterrence created by more severe sanctions and the effects of arrest policies on the overall rate of domestic violence. They recommend research on the impact of sanctions in more serious domestic violence cases and situations in which the suspect is not present when the police arrive, as well as studies to develop enhanced measures of aggression and injury.

Family Group Conferencing

Final report available from NCJRS

Restorative justice is an innovative concept generating a great deal of interest as an alternative to the conventional, retributive approach. It is grounded in ancient tradition, aiming to "restore" all parties affected by a crime—victims, offenders, and communities—by bringing them together to work out a resolution. Among its appeals are the considerable empowerment of victims and the requirement that offenders take steps to repair the harm they have done.

NIJ has been promoting the understanding of restorative justice in a number of ways. One was through a study of a family group conferencing project operated by the Bethlehem (Pennsylvania) Police Department. Family group conferencing, which originated in New Zealand, is a form of restorative justice that diverts young offenders from court by involving their families and their victims' families in the adjudication process.

In Bethlehem, uniformed community policing officers conduct the conferences. The police-based model was developed in Australia, where some of the Bethlehem project staff were sent for training. NIJ evaluated the project to find out if the approach was acceptable to the community and whether it helped solve ongoing problems.

Researchers Paul McCold and Benjamin Wachtel of the Community Service Foundation concluded that police officers are indeed capable of conducting the conferences, provided they receive adequate training and supervision; that while conferencing did not transform the attitudes, organizational culture, or role perceptions of officers overall, citizens who were exposed to it became more favorable to community-oriented policing; and that victims, offenders, and offenders' parents were satisfied with the conferencing process. However, when the researchers measured satisfaction with their particular case on the part of those involved, they found no difference between participating and nonparticipating groups. When the researchers examined how the program affected recidivism, they found that for property offenses, the rearrest rates of participants were no lower than those of nonparticipants, although for violent offenses the rate for participants was lower. The researchers cautioned that the likely reason for this lower rate was that participation was voluntary, producing a self-selection effect.

The final report of the study, "Bethlehem Police Family Group Conferencing Project," by P. McCold and J. Stahr, is available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJ 173725).

NIJ has explored restorative justice in a series of regional symposia, one product of which was a "notebook" of symposia materials, accessible online at NIJ's Web site. The concept and its prospects are examined by John Braithwaite in "Restorative Justice: Assessing Optimistic and Pessimistic Accounts," in *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, vol. 25, ed. Michael Tonry, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming. For an overview, see Leena Kurki's *Incorporating Restorative and Community Justice into American Sentencing and Corrections, Sentencing and Corrections—Issues for the 21st Century*, Research in Brief, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, September 1999 (NCJ 175723).